

SHAPESHIFTER

Slender actor and seasoned creature performer Doug Jones talks about his latest collaboration with Guillermo del Toro, playing the Amphibian Man in *The Shape of Water*.

Doug Jones has made a career out of playing monsters, ghouls and mythical creatures. The former contortionist is a cult figure in sci-fi, fantasy and horror circles for his unique ability to morph into roles as diverse as the Silver Surfer in *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* (2007) and the alien Saru in *Star Trek: Discovery*.

The actor is best known for his collaborations with director Guillermo del Toro, which began in 1997 with *Mimic*, and continued with roles in *Hellboy* and *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*, as Abe Sapien; *Pan's Labyrinth*, as The Faun and The Pale Man; as well as *Crimson Peak* and TV's *The Strain*.

"I'm very, very blessed and excited and

thankful and grateful to him. That man singlehandedly changed my life," says Jones. "I'd been working consistently anyway, but he was the page turner who took me from a nondescript guy who wears rubber to a kind of Boris Karloff or Lon Chaney or Bela Lugosi kind of star. We lost that kind of star for a while, but Guillermo was the one who brought it back, with me as the guy. Thank heaven."

In del Toro's latest, *The Shape of Water*, Jones plays an amphibious creature that is

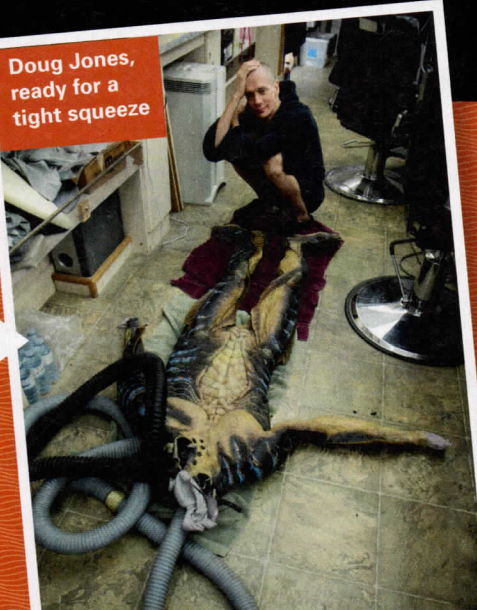
both the love interest and one of the principal players in the Oscar-winning film.

Set during the height of the Cold War, the story unfolds in a mysterious government facility in Baltimore where, in the deepest recesses of the lab, the creature is being studied for its unusual abilities. The facility's head of security, Strickland (Michael Shannon), demands for it to be killed and dissected, while mute cleaner Elisa (Sally Hawkins) feels a strange affinity with the beast and resolves

SUITING-UP

"I never set out to do monster work," says Jones. "I'm six-foot-three, 185 pounds, and fortunately the effects people took to me immediately. They were able to build monsters on me, because I'm not too bulky and have a sense of movement."

Doug Jones, ready for a tight squeeze



legs in





Doug Jones (in suit and on set) with Sally Hawkins and director Guillermo del Toro

• *The Shape of Water* is out on May 9

to release it, with the aid of her friend Zelda (Octavia Spencer) and her next door neighbour Giles (Richard Jenkins).

"It does harken a little bit to *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, which Guillermo will tell you is probably his favourite Universal monster movie," says Jones. "He loved the Universal monsters anyway, but there's something about water beasts I think he just loves."

Describing *The Shape of Water's* beast as "athletically graceful," Jones combined aspects of the Silver Surfer with a matador as a foundation for the character, adding that he made a conscious effort not to repeat what he had done with *Hellboy's* fish man hero, Abe Sapien.

"Abe was more artistic, more intellectual, more prim and proper. He had a very posh way about him that he could be a butler at a big mansion, whereas this fish man doesn't speak. The movie doesn't feel like a genre movie in the way *Hellboy* was. This is a very real story from 1962. This is really all happening. I am a creature that really was found in the Amazon River. With that has to come a little less flourish, less caricature and more real guy."

As well as being set during the 1960s, Jones notes that *The Shape of Water* possesses a very '60s feel reminiscent of the old school monster

movies that also featured a creature that engenders sympathy.

"When you see me through the eyes of Elisa, you see the compassion and sympathy and attraction, even. In the design phase they spent a lot of time working on making me look kissable. There

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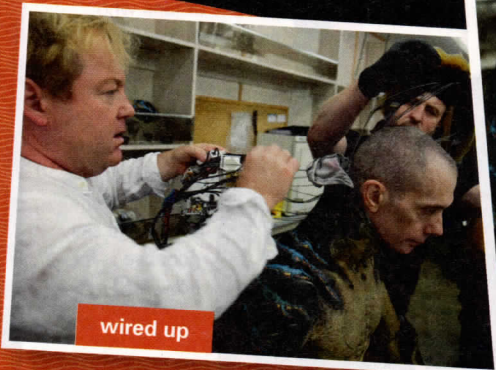
had to be an attraction that goes beyond, 'Oh, what a pretty fish,' and that's a tough design task. I applaud everybody on every facet of this, because it does take a village to make a creature like this work. I did not play this alone. I played this with everybody who

has an artistic hand in it, and there are many of them."

Del Toro has always sided with the creatures in his movies – the real monsters are often human, like *Pan's Labyrinth's* Captain Vidal and Strickland in *The Shape of Water*.

"He really has a true love affair with otherworldly things," Jones says. "He never lost his little boy. I think that's why audiences love him so much, why other filmmakers and we actors love him so much, because we're being directed by an eight-year-old boy who thinks this is so cool. Yet he's a brilliant visionary at the same time. He's very grown up, but he's never lost the child. That's why you'll see lots of child characters in his stories. Even in this story, in *The Shape of Water*, the role of Elisa is very childlike. Sally Hawkins is channelling this beautiful childlike character that does have a very vulnerable side. You really want to peel her layers and find out what makes that poor little thing tick. He taps into that, a familiar place in all of us, with every character that he creates.

"Another thing that Guillermo does love to do, he loves to buck authority when authority doesn't know what it's doing. That's another theme you'll see in a lot of his movies. In this case, the Cold War is on full tilt. The bureaucracy that happens, he's kind of peeling back the layers to see how corrupt it can be and how evil people in that system can be. This story is absolutely doing that. It takes a cleaning lady to shake things up and to put a mirror up to people and say, 'Look at how you're behaving.' Again, he loves the underdog. I think that comes from a place in him, where so many of us and so many of his fans and the lovers of his work are underdogs in our own life. We feel like we're a flower that needs to bloom and we need the right environment to do that in. Guillermo creates a place for us underdogs to bloom in." **S**



wired up



eyes on